Your Nature
Residential Volunteering at Scotland's National Nature Reserves

Scottish Natural Heritage
Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba
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Scottish Natural Heritage

Scotland is world renowned for its breath-taking scenery, and the nature and landscapes are among our greatest assets. Nature gives us food and drinking water, energy and timber. It contributes to a clean and healthy environment. And it improves our well-being and quality of life.

Our purpose is to:
– promote, care for and improve our natural heritage
– help people to enjoy nature responsibly
– enable greater understanding and awareness of nature
– promote the sustainable use of Scotland’s natural heritage

One way we do this is through managing our National Nature Reserves (NNRs) which are truly inspiring places where you can experience the incredible sights and sounds of our natural world. We have residential volunteering opportunities at three NNRs (see map below).
Residential volunteering on our NNRs

We need you!

We are looking for residential volunteers who truly care about the Scottish countryside to work on our NNRs who can commit to a minimum of 1 month. In return, our volunteers get the chance to learn a whole manner of skills, and experience working in the spectacular landscapes of Scotland. The more time you stay with us the more jobs you will be likely to experience and the more you will learn.

Scotland has 43 NNRs, each one celebrating the great variety of our habitats and species. Across the 29 NNRs that are managed by SNH, volunteers work on mountains, across lochs, in woodlands, and on islands. We are committed to restoring and conserving Scotland’s natural landscape. From expanding native woodland, managing open habitats and monitoring iconic species such as seabirds, divers and the Manx shearwater.
Why Volunteer For Scottish Natural Heritage?

Volunteering at our NNRs will give you valuable experience in the management and conservation of your natural heritage. You'll work with experienced and skilled people, who have mountains of knowledge and a keen passion for Scotland's landscapes. You'll gain skills that will help you get employment either in land management, or that can be transferred to other areas:

- Assist with our conservation work
- Learn about land management
- Gain practical skills, woodland and deer management, maintaining footpaths, engaging with visitors.
- Meet new people working on, or visiting, the NNR
- Explore new places
- Keep fit

Much of our practical work is physically demanding and so an enthusiasm to work outdoors in all weather and rugged terrain, is essential. A good degree of physical fitness is advantageous. The work of volunteers is varied, and you should be willing to help, even with mundane jobs. You’ll be personable, approachable, enthusiastic and a good communicator. You’ll have a strong interest in conservation. You need to be a good team-worker, respecting others. You’ll have a responsible attitude to health and safety, complying with procedures designed to keep you and others safe.

Our reserves are isolated, especially if you don’t have your own transport, so this must be a lifestyle you’d be comfortable with. Volunteers must be 18 or over. SNH provides shared accommodation for volunteers but not food. You must bring suitable outdoor, waterproof clothing and footwear.

You can find more information about other employment, placements and opportunities on our ‘working for SNH’ web pages (www.nature.scot/about-snh/working-snh).
What Do Our Volunteers Say?

Let’s hear from one of our recent volunteers about her experiences; Rebecca spent several months with us and is a UK based volunteer who wanted to get as much experience as possible in the land management and conservation sector.

“I’ve volunteered for SNH for 4 months, getting experience at 8 different NNRs. I’ve gained a really detailed insight into land management and conservation practices. I’ve observed and even participated in deer management; getting a wider understanding of something I’d never seen before. I’ve gained knowledge of issues and different perspectives affecting land management in Scotland, and talking with different people within SNH has raised my awareness of the different legislation and statutory requirements surrounding this industry.

My experience with SNH has been constantly refreshed with practical skills; wildlife and habitat surveying ranging from monitoring Shearwater burrows on Rum to conducting butterfly surveys at Creag Meagaidh, working with livestock such as soay sheep, highland cattle and other animals like the Rum ponies. I’ve acquired skills in path maintenance and what is needed to maintain visitor activity. It was also good to see conservation practices in forestry, especially at Beinn Eighe where we were winching trees over and all sorts to simulate windblow and create deadwood. I have also gained awareness of the key habitats and species’ in Scotland, which is something I really wanted to work on.

Over my time with SNH I have met lots of staff members and they’ve all been so knowledgeable, supportive and patient – our chats have been extremely valuable to me. This experience for me has been really special, and unique, all based in the stunning setting of the Scottish Highlands. I now feel confident in my knowledge and experience in terms of getting a job in the conservation/land management sector in Scotland.”

Rebecca, volunteer
Creag Meagaidh – A Gem of Scotland
www.nature.scot/creag-meagaidh

Situated in the heart of Scotland just west of the Cairngorms National Park, Creag Meagaidh is 3,940 hectares of wetland, woodland, heathland, farmland, and pure Scottish Highland. From the wild and windswept mountain plateau to a woodland that’s slowly finding its feet again, Creag Meagaidh feels like the Highlands compressed into one nature reserve. Rare mountain plants like woolly willow and highland saxifrage battle against the elements, whilst black grouse flourish in the combination of woodland and open moorland. With Munro summits, an exposed whaleback ridge and ice carved gullies, Creag Meagaidh is the complete mountain experience.

With 29,000 visitors a year, there’s also a lot of general site maintenance to be done; all transferable skills you can take away with you. As this is a mountainous and rugged site, it suits volunteers who enjoy working outdoors in all weathers.

As a volunteer at Creag Meagaidh, you could get involved with;
- Deer management
- General site maintenance including path work, fencing, grass cutting and other maintenance tasks
- Visitor management and engaging with visitors
- Biodiversity crop management
- Woodland management
- Animal husbandry for livestock used for conservation grazing
- Assist staff in habitat and wildlife surveying and monitoring (including bird surveys, butterfly transects, moth trapping, habitat surveillance)
- Removal of non-native plant species
- Assist with NNR events, education and walks programme
Creag Meagaidh also hosts many training events and workshops for outdoor professionals across Scotland, giving volunteers the opportunity to be involved. We also host students studying Wildlife Management courses who share the volunteer accommodation.

The majority of the reserve is set under three Munros and seven corries – ideal deer country. In the stalking season much of the work is out on the hill keeping the deer population healthy. The team at Creag Meagaidh are experienced in deer management, and you can learn a lot from them! As such volunteers interested in active deer management for nature conservation would be well suited here.

Our working days are 08:00–17:00 Monday to Thursday and 08:00–13:00 on Friday. We can offer bunk house accommodation in Aberarder at our converted farm house. The nearest shop is a 20–30 minute drive away, so your own transport is advised or you can usually order online.

“Creag Meagaidh is for me a place of adventure and surprises as you never know what the next day will bring; a place to find new friends… and to help Scotland’s fascinating nature by working in a great family and by following one guideline: Be happy. So, I will never forget my time at CM and will definitely be back.”

Lisa, volunteer
With a cluster of mountain peaks, ancient pinewoods, secretive crossbills and soaring golden eagles, it’s no wonder that Beinn Eighe was Britain’s first National Nature Reserve. From a distance the pale scree slopes on the mountain-side look like barren fields of snow, but get up close and you’ll be amazed by the diversity of wildlife that thrives on this internationally acclaimed reserve. Situated near Kinlochewe in stunning Wester Ross, the mountain forests of Beinn Eighe hold some of the last remnants of the ancient Caledonian pinewood that once covered most of Scotland.

Beinn Eighe translates as “Rough Toothed” or “File Toothed” and relates to the unique shape of the mountain range that serves as a backdrop to the Field Station and Visitor Centre. Over 4,700 hectares of ancient woodland, heathland and alpine habitat are managed here by SNH. Another unique feature of this NNR is the Loch Maree Islands which are also managed by SNH. These islands are the closest thing to natural woodland left in the UK.
As a volunteer at Beinn Eighe and Loch Maree Islands, you could get involved with:
- Woodland management and restructuring
- Growing of native tree species from local seed in our very own nursery!
- Deer management is a big part of allowing the native woodland to expand, and our volunteers can assist to get experience of this work during the season
- Habitat and wildlife surveying and monitoring (including bird surveys, butterfly transects, moth trapping, habitat surveillance)
- Removal of non-native plant species
- Visitor management and engaging with visitors
- General site maintenance including path work
- Assist with NNR events, education and walks programme

Our working days are 08:00–17:00 Monday to Thursday, and 08:00–12:00 on Friday. We can provide hostel style accommodation at our Field Station. We do not provide meals, however, there is a small shop nearby or you can order food online.

“I arrived at Beinn Eighe as part of a summer volunteering placement. I felt so welcomed by the staff and other volunteers, that I ended up spending three wonderful months here. During my time here my knowledge around conservation increased dramatically; as I learned about deer, woodland and habitat management. This place is rich with flora and fauna, and I honestly can’t imagine a more beautiful place to live and work. The stunning scenery has made the midges and fast changing weather worth it! I’ve met so many wonderful people and have made some strong friendships too. I spent my free time hiking, swimming, cycling and all sorts to really make the most of the reserve. This unforgettable experience will bring me a lot and I know I will come back soon to this bonny place where I feel like I’m at home.”

Nol Wen, volunteer
One of the Small Isles on the West Coast of Scotland, Rum is over 10,000 hectares of stunning natural beauty. This island, one of many, was formed millions of years ago at the bottom of a volcanic magma chamber, resulting in the unique rock formations that make its shape. If you want to escape the busy towns and cities of Scotland's mainland, then the tranquil isolation of Rum could be your calling.

The Isle of Rum is a remote island with a small resident community. Outside of the village, the NNR is dramatic and rugged, and home to several pairs of breeding golden eagles and white-tailed eagles which were first re-introduced to Scotland here in the 1970's. The mountains of the Rum Cuillin are home to one of the largest colonies of Manx shearwaters in the World, and the hills are dotted with lochans inhabited by breeding red-throated divers.

Rum is famous for its wild red deer. We use Highland ponies to assist with our deer management, and volunteers with an interest and experience of working with horses and ponies can help implement the pony training programme. Volunteers can also get involved in the wide range of important surveillance and monitoring projects that are carried out each year including Manx shearwaters, red-throated divers, red deer, feral goats and brown rats.
As a volunteer at Rum, you could get involved with;
- General site maintenance including path work, fencing, and other maintenance tasks
- Visitor management and engaging with visitors
- Animal husbandry for livestock used for conservation grazing
- Deer management
- Working with and assisting with the training of Highland ponies
- Assist staff in habitat and wildlife surveying and monitoring (including bird surveys, butterfly transects, habitat surveillance)
- Removal of non-native plant species
- Assist with NNR events, education and walks programme

The Small Isles are an invaluable part of your natural heritage in Scotland. Volunteering on Rum will give you a unique set of skills, not only in conservation, animal husbandry and land management, but also an opportunity to be part of a small island community.

Our working days are 08:30–17:00 Monday to Thursday and 08:30–16:30 on Friday. We can provide bunk house accommodation for residential volunteers, but food is not provided. There is a small shop on the island, and limited access to the mainland via ferry. Food can also be ordered from the Mallaig co-op.

“Rum for me was not quite what I expected, to be honest. Applying for a placement during which I might be monitoring bird populations, tracking rats and training stalking ponies looks very different on paper than it does when experiencing it. With the real-life experience came so much more than I could have hoped for; I got an insight into office life connected to reserve management. I learned about the people working for SNH, how they got here, what their opinions are on different subjects concerning the work SNH does on Rum. Getting into contact with people outside the organisation and hearing their opinions on the whole concept of a NNR on Rum and how it might influence local life on Rum. But most importantly I was thrown into a field of work in which I had no experience whatsoever. Some of my prejudices were proven wrong when meeting some truly incredible people on the island. It not only opened my eyes to what other types of work is possible but also to what my approach is when meeting new people.”

Sarah, volunteer
How to Apply

Please fill in a Volunteer Expression of Interest Form which can be downloaded from our volunteer web page here:
www.nature.scot/about-snh/working-snh/volunteer-snh

Please indicate on the form that you are interested in residential volunteering and your first second and third choice of NNRS from Creag Meagaidh, Beinn Eighe and Rum.

Please email the form to VOLUNTEER@nature.scot